

“GOD FORBID” – LUKE 20:16 etc. – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

At Luke 20:16 in the “Authorized” King James Bible, we find:

He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

Now for many this is seen as a text critical problem. Indeed, it is even offered as *prima facie* evidence that the King James Bible contains translation errors. The reason is that the Koiné Greek at the end of the verse reads **μή γένοιτο** (*me genoito*). *Me* is a negative particle (pronounced mā due to the Greek ἢ: literal = not) and *genoito* (may it happen) is a verb in the optative mood. *Me genoito* is used 15 times in the Greek NT, once by Luke and 14 times by Paul (e.g., Rom. 3:4, 6 & 31, 6:2 & 15, 7:7 & 13, 9:14, 11:1 & 11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17, 3:21).

Every time, the King James translators render the expression *me genoita* as “God forbid”; however, the word “God” in any form (e.g., θεός = nominative case = Theos: genitive = Theou) is not in any Greek text and neither is the Greek for “forbid” (**κωλυω**, Eng. = kōluō). A well known “conservative” leader has remarked that this is “the most obvious of the translational problems of the KJV.” Other translations transpose the word order into: “let it never be”, “may it not happen”, “may it never be”, “of course not”, “by no means”, “certainly not” etc.

Well, there you have it. The problem with the KJB has been exposed and laid bare before all. But, we wonder, is this really all there is to this issue?

First, we observe that the English versions written *before* the 1611 printing of the KJB use this same expression, “God forbid”, including Wycliffe, 1380 (who translated from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate); Tyndale, 1534; Coverdale, 1535; The Great Bible (Cranmer), 1539; Matthew’s Bible (John Rogers), 1549; the Bishop’s Bible, 1568; the Geneva Bible, 1557 & 1599 and the Catholic Douay-Rheims NT of 1582 (also translated from the Latin Vulgate).

“God forbid” is also the reading found in John Wesley’s NT translation of 1755, Whiston’s Primitive New Testament of 1745, the Worsley Version of 1790, the 1881 English Revised Version (of Westcott-Hort infamy), and the American Standard Version of 1901.

The Douay version of 1950 has “God forbid” at Luke 20:16; Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians, The World English Bible in Luke 20:16 and Gal. 2:17, Weymouth Version in Mat. 16:22, Luke 20:16 and Gal. 6:14, the Revised Standard Version of 1952 in Mt. 16:22 and Luke 20:16, J. B. Phillips has “God forbid” in Luke 20:16, the New Jerusalem Bible 1985 has “God forbid” in Luke 20:16, the New Living Translation 1996 in Luke 20:16 and Galatians 6:14. Also the 1998 Third Millennium Bible, and The Update Bible of 2003 have “God forbid” in all the same passages as does the King James Bible.

Other recent English Bible translations that use the phrase “GOD FORBID” in places like Romans 3:4 are The Amplified Bible 1987 and The New European Version 2010.

Furthermore, the OT word **לֹא־יִשְׁלַח**, which is the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek *me genoito*, is also rendered as “God forbid” at Joshua 22:29 and 24:16 in many of the versions listed above (“GOD FORBID that we should rebel against the LORD” – “And the people answered and said, “GOD FORBID that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods!”). What’s more, **לֹא־יִשְׁלַח** is often given as “God forbid” at the other seven OT passages in which it appears (Gen. 44:7, 17; 1 Sam. 12:23, 14:45, 20:2; 1 Chr. 11:19 and Job 27:5).

Although the LXX does not translate *me genoito* as “God forbid” at Joshua 22:29 and 24:16, it does prove this to be the Greek equivalent of הַלֵּלֵךְ. Now the LXX goes at least as far back as the fifth column in Origen’s Hexapla, or around 245 AD (his 5th column is the only Septuagint actually *known* to have existed: no physical evidence of any BC Greek OT has ever been found). Its existence rests solely on a fiction called the “Letter of Aristeas” which was exposed as a legend as early as 1705 (See my *The Septuagint: a critical analysis*, KingsWord Press, 2009). Thus, *me genoito* was translated from הַלֵּלֵךְ by Origen (as did Jerome in his Latin Vulgate) many centuries before Wycliffe (1380 AD), Tyndale (1534 AD), or the King James translators.

Surely no rational, honest reader can ignore such a vast amount of data. Can anyone read these examples and actually conclude that all of these translators did not know the word *Theos* or the Greek for “forbid” was missing? Really? After all, they translated *Theos* as “God” many, many times elsewhere in the NT. Could these many translators (and all were not listed in the foregoing) have known something significantly relevant to this matter that many of the more recent did not? And if so, what could that be?

Many years ago, while studying NT Koine Greek, this author learned that μὴ γένοιτο (*me genoito*) was an idiom! (an expression having a meaning different from the literal) And that was the end of the entire problem. Obviously, all the previously listed translators *knew* such to be a Greek idiom and thus rendered it as “God forbid.” Therefore, those deeming this to be an error in the KJB obviously do not know it to so be. The problem here is that good men often will not humble their intellect and their education before the Word of God in simple faith. Shame.

Indeed, Dr. Daniel Baird Wallace (born 1952 and professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary) strongly agrees that μὴ γένοιτο is a Greek idiom and that it should not be literally translated (“Review of the NIV 2011”: part 2 of 4 and his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*). Now Dr. Wallace is a New Testament text critic who is neither a friend of the *Textus Receptus* Greek NT nor of the King James Bible. Nevertheless, he goes on to inform his readers that the KJB translators clearly knew that neither ‘God’ nor ‘forbid’ are present in the Greek.

Dr. Wallace may not agree with every instance in which the KJB translated μη γενοιτο as “God forbid”, but he says “μη γενοιτο is a Greek idiom that should not be literally translated.” Again, this is exactly what this writer was taught (see: Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of NT Words*, “forbid”, p. 447) – when a New Testament writer pens “μη γενοιτο” the implied subject is God.

Concerning this issue, the kjvtoday.com website adds: “Contrary to what many critics believe, the idiom, ‘God forbid’ did not originate in English. It is an idiom of biblical Hebrew origin, first introduced in 1 Samuel 24:6: ‘The LORD forbid that I should do this thing...’ (ESV, NIV). Thus the idiom has biblical precedent and is legitimate.” Moreover, the KJB translators did not add “God” when translating μη γενοιτο. They merely fully and clearly expressed the subject that was implied or understood though not directly expressed in Greek. Such is so common in translation that it is never an issue.

Most of the 47 KJB 1611 translators were professors and/or preachers. Those that were Bishops had small portions of the project displayed in public places throughout their diocese as it came from the translators, and recommendations were encouraged. This placed the entire work open to the populace so that the whole of England took part in its production. Hundreds of laymen, priests, and preachers who knew Greek and/or Hebrew offered suggestions. Surely their accumulated knowledge exceeds that of any one man or committee of translators – especially of such that do not know μη γενοιτο is an idiom: one that has been known as such for centuries.